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THE SOUL OF
A NATION

THE SOUL OF A NATION

Preached by

The Right Hon. and Right Rev.
Arthur F. Winnington-Ingram, D.D.
Lord Bishop of London

From the Steps of
ST. PAUL'S CATHEDRAL
July 25, 1915

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PUBLISHERS' NOTE

IT is a pleasure to be able to present the remarkable sermon which was preached by the Right Rev. Arthur Foley Winnington-Ingram, Bishop of London, from the steps of St. Paul's Cathedral on Sunday, July 25, 1915, in this cheap and accessible form. Amongst all the pulpit utterances that have owed their origin to the Great War

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in Europe this address stands out with extraordinary clearness. It crystallizes, in a series of striking paragraphs, the real inner meaning of the terrible conflict of armed forces that is now in progress, and it utters, in clarion accents, a call to the people of England to rise to the heights of the great opportunities that are now offered to them for the noblest and most unselfish forms of service.

¶ The Bishop of London has not only a prescriptive but a personal

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right to speak about our soldiers. He is not only chaplain to the London Rifle Brigade but is Bishop of the Chaplaincies in Northern-Central Europe, so that when he went on his recent memorable visit to the Front he was performing a double duty—he was looking after the interests of the men who were in his spiritual charge and he was travelling over a portion of his own diocese. No fatigue has been too great since the war began for the Bishop of the Battlefields, as he is called sometimes. Wherever duty

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has called, he has gone ungrudgingly, although he is now in his 57th year and has spent many more years in ecclesiastical harness than usually fall to the lot of men in his exalted position. And when he returned from France at the end of a fortnight's never-ceasing toil, he summed up his own impression of his mission amongst the soldiers at the Front in this striking phrase: "I have had the experience of my life."

As his chaplain stated after-

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wards : " Many people would give a great deal to see the British Army in the Field—indeed most men long to be serving with it there—but the Bishop had the opportunity to acquire first-hand knowledge of all that is happening across the Channel from one end of the line to the other, both in the generals' headquarters and the soldiers' billets. But he was not referring to this side of the visit when he used these words. . . . He went out for one object, and for one object only. He went out to hold a mission. . . .

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He left England to make a spiritual appeal to the men, and the response exceeded anything that he could have anticipated." And he was able to state afterwards : "The truth of the matter is that the realities of war have melted away the surface shyness of men about religion ; they feel they are 'up against' questions of life and death."

Over those who seek a mere rehash of partisan cries or a noisy re-statement of crude patriotic shibboleths

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the following message of the Bishop of London to the People of England may conceivably exercise very little influence. The Bishop did not appeal to that class. Those people were not the object of the service around that hallowed stone on which Queen Victoria stood when her Majesty went in solemn state to the National Valhalla to return thanks for a reign of fifty years as Sovereign. In point of fact the whole significance of the occasion was summed up by the writer in the *Daily Telegraph* the next

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morning when he related how "three thousand soldiers knocked humbly yesterday afternoon at the great doors of St. Paul's Cathedral. They came to pray for courage and for victory, and so they gathered at the threshold of the great Metropolitan church."

“Outwardly,” he added, “they were the representatives of the City of London Territorials, but to the tens of thousands who reverently assisted at the service they were the embodiment of the chivalry and self-

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sacrifice which daily finds noble expression along the entire front of our far-flung battle line. And it was not for themselves alone that these soldiers had come to pray. Their voices were raised in humble supplication for those who have fallen in the terrible conflict : their prayers were uttered for those whose hearts are in sore distress."

¶ Everything seemed in harmony with so memorable an occasion. "Sombre and vast against the leaden

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sky stood the great West Front of the Cathedral. As if in keeping with the storm and the clash of battle, the rain fell in close persistent sheets, drenching the throng of worshippers. It was a scene moving alike by its sombre dignity, as by the deep significance with which it was charged. No place could have been more fitting for the appeal of the Church to the soul of a nation—the steps of the shrine where lie at rest the great sons who have built up an Empire's greatness."

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¶ To-day people who took part in that great ritual of intercession speak of it as one of the most profound and moving spectacles they can ever hope to witness. As far as the eye could reach down Ludgate Hill and along the Strand the pavements seemed to be packed with people whom not even the torrential rains that fell almost throughout the service could drive into shelter. They awaited patiently the arrival of the long procession of soldiers who had marched, with the Bishop in their midst, from

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Trafalgar Square along the Strand
to Wren's great edifice.

¶ The regiments represented in that march were the 1st to the 8th Battalions of the City of London Territorial regiments and the Honorable Artillery Company, with the 1st, 2nd and 3rd London Field Ambulance Sections. The drums of the Honorable Artillery Company formed the altar for the service when, relates the writer we have already quoted, "the Bishop unmindful of the heavy

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and persistent rain came forward, escorted by his chaplains, and preceded by his pastoral staff." It was a happy omen that the sun blazed forth just as the Bishop began to speak.

“He took his place beneath the great portico whilst the soldiers ranged themselves silently round the great flight of steps. The clergy and choir, robed and surpliced, took post on the Cathedral steps, and the Bishop advanced to the piled drums. ‘O God, our Help in

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ages past' broke on the air. The strains were taken up by the huge concourse, and lost themselves in a confused echo as they sped along the vast human avenue. And then came the impassioned address by the Prelate in simple direct phrase. 'For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?'"

¶ Critics now would find it difficult to estimate or to appreciate the sensation that this sermon caused

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in England when extracts from it appeared in the public press and were telegraphed all over the world. The *Times* took advantage of the occasion to point out how many calls in this country were "still being made and still being answered—calls for men, calls for personal service. Calls for money, calls for the renunciation of luxury and a return to a simpler and more frugal mode of life. The Bishop of London," it added, "was right when he said that 'it is only a new England which has come back to her

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best self which can save the world to-day.'"

¶ Another journal recalled the phrase of the poet "Kneeling ne'er spoilt silk stocking," and that still less does it spoil the uniform of the soldier, and declared that the Bishop had spoken eloquently of the soul of the various nations—"of Belgium, which had lost all but honour and is the greater for her loss; of France, which has become transfigured by the war; and of the 'great patient soul of Russia,' which

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has been revealed by the touch of the purging fire. The question," it contended, "for all of us is : 'What of the soul of Britain?' Are we emerging from the ordeal as noble as France and Russia? We have been spared the unspeakable horrors which have befallen them ; are we doing all that we ought in order to mark our gratitude?"

“Our people,” cried another writer, “are consecrated to a task more than national. Outside St. Paul’s the nation gathered together

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desiring its own change of heart, knowing that, if it is to be made worthy to conquer it will conquer in the cause of Christendom ; but knowing also that it must overcome—besides those enemies who, with their new doctrine, threaten all that Christendom has desired to be—its own selfishness, its own dullness, its own lack of faith.

⊗ “That was the spirit expressed in the prayers and in the words of the Bishop of London, and that was, we cannot doubt, the spirit of all

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the troops ranged before him" and of the silent crowd as they listened eagerly to the following address.

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This sermon will be included
in the forthcoming volume
of Sermons by the Bishop
of London, entitled "The
Church in War Time," to
be published shortly.

“For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”

Matthew xvi, 26.

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I THINK the most striking cartoon which I have ever seen was in the pages of our greatest comic paper six months ago. It was when Belgium had been ravaged up to the last town—and a dark figure says sneeringly

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to the King of Belgium, “*So you have lost everything*”; but with a noble pride instinct in every feature, the King answers back, “*Not my soul.*”

I. It was a great answer and a true one; the soul of a nation is more than its material possessions: “*What does it profit a nation, if it*

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gain the whole world and loses its soul?"

i. Belgium in her poverty to-day is far greater than Belgium rich with the rubber trade from the Congo—for she stands pure in soul, unconquerable in spirit, untailed in fame—*she has lost her wealth; she has found her soul.*

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2. So with *France*. Those who have come recently from France stand entranced before the change in the nation ; there was a time when the antagonism to the Roman Catholic priesthood seemed degenerating into a hatred of religion — Paris was the home of gaiety and the fount of fashion.

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¶ But there is a *new France in the world to-day*—absolutely *one*, with a passionate patriotism which is like a flame; all pleasures are flung aside—she pants for the day when the fair provinces taken by the enemy shall be restored, and the fangs of the wild beast which have been fastened in her, shaken off.

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¶ There are no great national resources in France available for comforts for the soldiers. Paid their franc and a quarter a day, out of this the wife saves enough to send some little comfort to her man in the trenches. Purified by a fire of trial of which we have no conception here—*France has found her soul.*

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3. And what shall we say of *Russia*? Those of us who have visited Russia have always loved the *great soul of Russia*. To Palestine every year, for every ten pilgrims from other countries, there come at least 1000 from Russia. Beneath the vodka habit, behind what often seemed a lack of mission spirit in the Church, behind

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the old mistaken political methods which produced so many revolutions, *a great soul breathed*, and at the touch of the purging fire it has been revealed. In a week, the vodka was flung aside, in a day the nation was unified under its leader; within a month freedom was promised to the nationalities under its sway; the religion

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which breathed beneath great state functions was seen to be genuine and *the great patient soul of Russia was revealed.* Russia will never be conquered—while the world lasts; not only because of the extent of its territory, but because of the soul of its people; they may be pushed back and back, but they will burn and suffer, and

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suffer and burn as they go
—they may lose the whole
world but they will keep
their soul.

II. The Church has come out
to-day to give a message to
the soul of our nation. *Have
we got a soul?* Who that
knows the history of the
English people can doubt it?
It is a soul which gets over-

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laid like the soul of other nations, with love of *material comfort*; with arrogance, and with worldliness; but the children would not be springing from all over the world to the mother's side, if the mother had no *soul*, if there had been no love for freedom, no belief in honour, no care for the weak, no contempt for the merely

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strong; then there would have been no glad loyalty from thousands and tens of thousands who have rallied round her Flag.

❖ Can we admit for a moment that the soul of the nation which won Agincourt, which flung back the Armada, which withstood for many years the armies of Napoleon

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is not as great as the soul
of other nations?

¶ Rather we believe that in this equally balanced contest on the Continent it is the *soul of England which is to once again free the world*; no calamity can be pictured more awful than if at this supreme crisis in the history of the world England should fail.

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III. But, if we are to rise to our vocation—

(I) The first essential thing is that *as a nation*, not as a few groups of pious individuals, but as a nation, *we should turn to God*; the only power which can save Europe to-day is a nation which, while it fights and works and serves and saves without stint, is

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also a *nation on its knees.*

⌘ Do we really believe in God's strength? Do we believe in an Almighty God at all? Or is prayer waste of time? Do we really believe in the promise "Seek *first* the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you."

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¶ It is for that reason that I have summoned London, as the Archbishops have again and again summoned the nation, day and night to pray.

(2) But to pray with effect, we must *pray with a good conscience*, and that is the real significance of the Church's call to *repentance*.

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Repentance is not a weak whining to God on our knees because we are in a difficulty, it is a noble laying aside of all that makes us unworthy of working with The Great Friend.

¶ It was said by a well-known atheist, "the Great Companion is dead." The answer of a believing nation

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is that He whom the atheist ventured to call "the Great Companion" is *not* dead but that He can only work with those who keep His laws, and obey His will and share His mind and refuse to do evil that good may come.

¶ *Can we as a nation say that we have always done*

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this? Do we not know that again and again we have ignored His day, neglected His worship, and broken His commandment to “keep our bodies in temperance, soberness and chastity.”

¶ To win this war then, to liberate the *spiritual powers in heavenly places* which are at our disposal,

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we must repent as well as pray, and amend as well as repent; it is only a *new England, which has come back to her best self, which can save the world to-day.*

(3) But with the penitence and prayer must go a *spirit of service which must impress the world.*

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We have had a call addressed to the nation by its responsible leaders, for "*Universal voluntary service.*" It is the greatest call which can be addressed to a nation. No other nation believes it possible. Every one knows it is the last time that we can afford to leave the call voluntary, but, if it can be given, voluntary

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service is *the noblest form of service.*

“I am among you as He that serveth,” cried the great Captain of Salvation, and it was voluntary service of which He spoke.

“He sent no angel to our race
Of higher or of lower place,
But wore the robe of human frame
Himself
And to this lost world came.”

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“*By love serve one another*”—in those old words the Church calls to the soul of the nation to rise to this great vocation, and from the highest to the lowest to offer itself for service, with the single-hearted cry, “*Here I am, send me.*”

(4) But there must be something more even than service, and I am only put-

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ting in a fuller form what I have written in my letter to the people of London, we *must also save.*

⊗ No one yet realizes the changes which this war is going to make to all of us; a financial expert told us the other day that many rich men living in large houses would be living in cottages

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after the war; but the test of whether the soul of the nation is rising to its vocation, is whether it is ready to bear this cheerfully, so long as it *has kept its honour untarnished and fully achieved its great aim.*

When we are fighting for the freedom of the Home of Freedom, for the liberties of

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the world, for International Honour, for Christ upon the Cross as opposed to the revived pagan doctrine that *might is right*, the Church calls upon the nation to say that no sacrifice matters if you win.

“No easy hopes or lies shall bring us to our goal,
But iron sacrifice of body, will and soul.”

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¶ We summon then the soul of England to *arise in all its grandeur and strength at this crisis* of the day of God. Come from the four winds, thou Breath of the Spirit, and breathe upon this great people that hope and faith and love may once again revive and the world be saved again by the “Soul of a People.”

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